

Sports

Presidents Cup players tamp down talk of a US blowout

Record five Asians at Presidents Cup sign of golf's growth

News in brief

Federer's farewell match

LONDON: Roger Federer said Wednesday he wants to team up with long-time rival Rafael Nadal for the final match of his career at the Laver Cup in London. The 20-time Grand Slam winner announced last week he intended to retire after the tournament at London's O2 arena, which starts on Friday. Federer, whose last competitive match was a loss to Hubert Hurkacz in last year's Wimbledon quarter-finals, has been struggling with a knee problem. He will play in the doubles on Friday evening but will not play a singles match in London. The Swiss does not yet know whether he will be able to team up with Nadal but said that would be the dream scenario. "Of course, no doubt," he told a packed press conference. "I think it would be quite a unique situation if it were to happen. For as long as we battled together, there was always this respect for one another - our families, our coaching teams, we always got along really well."

Badosa bundled out

TOKYO: Spanish top seed Paula Badosa fell at the first hurdle at the Pan Pacific Open in Tokyo on Wednesday, losing 6-3, 6-2 to fast-rising Chinese teenager Zheng Qinwen. World number four Badosa, who was eliminated in the round of 64 at the recent US Open, struggled to gain a foothold against 36th-ranked Zheng and joined number two seed Caroline Garcia in making an early exit from the tournament. Badosa failed to hit a single ace and lost seven straight games before ending a miserable evening in the Japanese capital by swatting a return straight into the ground on match point. The 19-year-old Zheng, who reached the last 32 at the US Open, said her win over Badosa was "not a surprise" for her. "I always know that I have the level," said Zheng. "It's just when to make it. I'm so happy that I can make this match and I want to repeat it again."

Raducanu survives wobble

SEOUL: Former US Open champion Emma Raducanu overcame a late wobble before defeating Japan's 126th-ranked Moyuka Uchijima in her opening match at the Korea Open on Wednesday. The 19-year-old Briton, whose US Open defense collapsed in the first round last month, won 6-2, 6-4 to make the last 16 in Seoul. The sixth seed will face Yanina Wickmayer of Belgium. Raducanu reached a career-high 10th in the world, but is now 77th, having failed to build on her shock success at Flushing Meadows last year. After rattling through the first set, the teenager picked up the pace in the second to surge into a 5-0 lead in less than 20 minutes. A Raducanu double-fault in the sixth game gave Uchijima a whiff of survival and the Japanese won four straight games, before Raducanu finally sealed the match with an ace.

Neuer, Goretzka ruled out

BERLIN: Germany Captain Manuel Neuer and midfielder Leon Goretzka have been ruled out of the upcoming Nations League clashes with Hungary and England after recording positive COVID tests. The news was confirmed by the German team in Frankfurt on Wednesday, where the squad are in training. The pair, who are teammates at Bayern Munich, have left the camp and will not take part in either of the upcoming fixtures. Hoffenheim keeper Oliver Baumann has been called in to replace Neuer, with another player set to be nominated for Goretzka sometime on Wednesday afternoon. Germany's Bild tabloid reports the tests were carried out due to a positive test for a close personal contact of one of the players. Both players tested negative on Monday when they entered camp.

Socrates award for players

BOULOGNE-BILLANCOURT: The Ballon d'Or organisers said on Wednesday they are adding a humanitarian prize to this year's ceremony named for Socrates the elegant Brazil midfielder, who also held a medical degree. "The Socrates Prize will identify the best social initiative by committed champions," said a statement from France Football magazine, which awards the Ballon d'Or. Those initiatives will include those promoting social integration, protection of the environment or aid to groups who are disadvantaged, threatened or victims of conflict. France Football said they chose Socrates, who died in 2011 aged 57, because of his commitment to a campaign he helped organize at his club, Corinthians in Sao Paulo, while Brazil was under a military dictatorship called "Corinthian Democracy". While they were warned to stop interfering in political affairs, the players escaped unpunished because of their high profile and because they focused on introducing democracy only at their club, insisting there was a vote on decisions on how the club was run. — From AFP

CHARLOTTE: There's a blowout expected this week at the Presidents Cup, but you wouldn't know it listening to favored Americans downplay their advantages and the Internationals talk of a stunning upset. The United States boasts 12 of the world's top 25 golfers, including top-ranked Masters champion Scottie Scheffler, for the team showdown that begins Thursday at Quail Hollow.

The Internationals, who counter with five of the world's top 30, lost half a squad with defections to the LIV Golf Series, including British Open winner Cameron Smith, the world number three from Australia. They have eight rookies and a sense of nothing to lose, but it would be an epic shocker for them to defeat one of the best American lineups ever assembled.

"That's on paper. The games aren't played on paper," US captain Davis Love said. "We have a higher-ranked team, but I know a bunch of those young guys on their team and they're going to come in with a chip on their shoulder and together." Internationals captain Trevor Immelman is counting on both. "They will be ready come Thursday because they've got something to prove," Immelman said. "This is the stage to find out if you've got what it takes or not."

"There's a magical amount of respect for the US team. We can see if we can match up with their skills. We can see how good we are. The exciting part for us is it does free us up... have a blast and let 'er rip." The Americans own an 11-1-1 edge in the all-time rivalry, taking the past eight from the global squad. Their only loss came at Melbourne in 1998. "It has stung," said 10th-time starter Adam Scott said of the drought. "It has been frustrating. A lot."

Past Masters winners Scott and Hideki Matsuyama and South Koreans Im sung-jae and Kim Si-woo are the only Internationals players with Presidents Cup experience. They are joined by rookies Kim Joo-hyung, Lee Kyoung-hoon, Corey Conners, Taylor Pendrith, Cameron Davis, Sebastian Munoz, Mito Pereira and Christiaan Bezuidenhou. "I still remain incredibly optimistic that we have a shot," Scott said. "I'm leaning into the younger guys."

USA likely to start basketball WCup with just 7 players

SYDNEY: The United States could begin their bid to win a fourth straight women's basketball World Cup on Thursday with just seven players, but coach Cheryl Reeve is adamant they can cope. Their 12-strong roster features five players who took part in the WNBA Finals and are currently making the long trek to Australia. The coach said the quintet - Chelsea Gray, Kelsey Plum, Aja Wilson, Brianna Jones and Alyssa Thomas - would be allowed to recharge and acclimatise after the Las Vegas Aces

PGA players say LIV must wait, change for world ranking

CHARLOTTE: PGA players at the Presidents Cup pushed back Tuesday on a call by Saudi-backed LIV Golf Series players for world ranking points, saying they must wait and make major changes. In an open letter to rankings board chairman Peter Dawson, all 48 players in last week's Chicago Invitational asked for retroactive recognition of the 54-hole, shotgun start events.

"An OWGR (Official World Golf Rankings) without LIV would be incomplete and inaccurate," the players said, comparing it to England, Argentina and Belgium being left out of the FIFA rankings. But Billy Horschel, a rookie on the US squad facing the Internationals at this week's team matches in Charlotte, said LIV doesn't meet the criteria for ranking points and players knew the risks when they left the PGA for the record riches on offer from the upstart series.

"I know it's a year to an 18-month process before they even get world ranking points. So just wait it out. Meet the criteria," Horschel said. "They don't meet, from what I've been told, the first nine things on the criteria list. They don't have an average field size of 78. They don't have a cut. They don't have open qualifying. They don't award points or spots to local qualifiers. They don't have a Q-School. All

'Gentle soul' Griner's fate on USA minds at basketball World Cup

SYDNEY: Coach Cheryl Reeve admitted Wednesday the fate of "gentle soul" Brittney Griner was weighing heavily on the USA team at the basketball World Cup in Sydney and the jailed star's number 15 jersey would not be worn at the tournament. Griner, a standout when they won gold at the Tokyo Olympics last year, would normally be with the squad as they attempt to claim a fourth straight title and 11th overall, starting Thursday against Belgium.

But the 31-year-old is instead in a Russian prison, sentenced to nine years in a penal colony after being arrested at a Moscow airport in



CHARLOTTE: Scottie Scheffler (right) of the United States Team chips with coach Randy Smith during a practice round prior to the 2022 Presidents Cup at Quail Hollow Country Club. —AFP

Their enthusiasm and excitement is good for a long fart like me to see."

Three-time major winner Jordan Spieth, who makes a US-best fourth start, has seen rivals win titles this year, including Matsuyama, Lee and Kim Joo-hyung. "If you look at the guys on their team, they have been on great form the past six months," he said. "Every one has either won or almost won a tournament."

Record five Asians

Meanwhile, a record five Asian players will be part of the Internationals lineup attempting to pull off an upset over the United States at the Presidents Cup starting on Thursday. Japan's Hideki Matsuyama, the 2021 Masters champion, is joined by a record four South Koreans - Im Sung-jae, Kim Joo-hyung, Lee Kyoung-hoon and Kim Si-woo in

sealed the WNBA Finals 3-1 against the Connecticut Sun on Monday. "We're giving them the time that they need because they are making huge sacrifices to jump on a plane right after a grueling series and a grueling WNBA season," Reeve said.

The USA coach said they would be short-handed for their opener against Belgium on Thursday and possibly again on Friday against Puerto Rico. "A full roster has been named but whether all the players will be present, that is not likely," said Reeve. "It's a fluid process and for me as a coach when they show up for practice, then I know they're there. For now, we'll go with what we have and when some of those players start to come here, we'll be able to get them up to speed very quickly."

"I mean it'll be a factor, for sure, the short-term situation. You get through those games as best you can and then obviously they'll be able to feature a

little bit more as the competition goes on."

The dominant Americans, gunning for an 11th title overall, are already without retired legends Sue Bird and Diana Taurasi, while Brittney Griner continues to languish in a Russian jail. But Breanna Stewart, Jewell Loyd, Kahleah Copper and Ariel Atkins all played in their Tokyo Olympic gold medal-winning side last year.

Stewart, the MVP at the last World Cup, is at her third consecutive World Cup, while Loyd, Plum and Wilson are playing their second after beating Australia to win gold in 2018. The rest are making their World Cup debuts. "Whatever numbers we have, we'll go with it," said Stewart. "We'll make sure our schemes are right, our scouting report is right, not look at the disadvantage," she said. "We know we have reinforcements coming and we just need to hold it down till then." —AFP



CHARLOTTE: Billy Horschel of the United States Team plays an approach shot on the 15th hole as fans look on during a practice round prior to the 2022 Presidents Cup at Quail Hollow Country Club. —AFP

these things that they don't have."

The move comes as LIV Golf chairman Greg Norman visits US lawmakers in Washington this week to discuss the upstart circuit and its anti-trust lawsuit against the US PGA Tour. But he'll also get questions about Saudi Arabia's human rights record. Obtaining world golf ranking points is vital for LIV players if they hope to qualify for majors based upon their world ranking, a pivotal step in playing in future major championships.

LIV players were allowed in this year's US and British Opens, the tour's June debut coming after qualifying for those events. World number three Cameron Smith of Australia, who won the British Open in July, won LIV's Chicago Invitational on Sunday with two-time major winner Dustin Johnson sharing second. "The level of competition at the average LIV event is at least equal to that at the average PGA Tour event," the players claimed. "We know because we've played in both." —AFP

February for possessing vape cartridges with a small amount of cannabis oil. Reeve said Griner would be "top of mind" throughout the 10-day tournament, and revealed players had been in touch with her to send messages of support. "The mindset is just trying to stay strong for her and doing what we can," Reeve said, describing Griner as "a gentle soul, just full of love."

She added that players had been able to communicate with their teammate via email, sending "messages of love and support and strength". "It's on their minds every day. It's heavy, it is really, really heavy especially as we participate in this USA basketball competition," she added. "She's such a big part of many of our lives, so it's challenging." No USA team member will don Griner's number 15 jersey in Sydney. "To keep Brittney top of mind, no one will wear the number 15. That will be the first way to honor her and keep her in our thoughts," said Reeve. —AFP



MOSCOW: In this file photo, US Women National Basketball Association's (WNBA) basketball player Brittney Griner is escorted to the courtroom to hear the court's final decision in Khimki outside Moscow. —AFP